

# Commission on Children and Youth

Annual Report

2016-2017



Montgomery County, Maryland  
Commission on Children and Youth

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## Mission Statement

The Commission on Children and Youth promotes the well-being of Montgomery County's children, youth, and families so that all young people may realize their full potential and become contributing, productive adults.

The Commission advances its mission by: (1) identifying the needs of young people and their families, and the groups and agencies that serve them; (2) informing and advising the County Executive, the County Council, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Board of Education (BOE), and the community at large; (3) recommending policies, programs, funding, and legislative priorities; and (4) affirming the needs, aspirations, and achievements of all the County's young people.

## Commission Structure

The Commission and its subcommittees meet on the second Wednesday of every month (September to June) from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. The Youth Advisory Committee meets from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. on the same evening. The Commission meetings are open to the public and are held at the Early Childhood Training Center located at 1401 Rockville Pike, Lobby Level, Rockville, MD 20852.

The scope of issues and priorities the Commission can address is broad and far-reaching. In order to focus its work, the Commission holds an annual strategic planning retreat and selects priority issues for the year. Subcommittees are formed around the selected priorities.

In 2016-2017, the Commission elected to prioritize:

- **Opioid Epidemic and the Impact on Youth**
- **Commission Advocacy**

The Commission hosts two major community events each year: Youth Having a Voice Roundtable, which allows the Commission, public officials, and the larger community to learn more about the knowledge and opinions of Montgomery County youth, and the Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards, which honors individuals and organizations that provide extraordinary service to the children and youth of our community.

# Letter from the Chair



November 1, 2017

**The Honorable Isiah Leggett  
Montgomery County Executive**

**The Honorable Roger Berliner, President  
Montgomery County Council**

**The Honorable Michael A. Durso, President  
Montgomery County Board of Education**

**Uma Ahluwalia, Director  
Montgomery County Department of Health  
and Human Services**

**Residents of Montgomery County**

Dear Mr. Leggett, Mr. Berliner, Mr. Durso, Ms. Ahluwalia and Residents of Montgomery County,

The Commission on Children and Youth has had another successful year and I am pleased to share our work and progress with you in this Annual Report.

Our substantive work focused on two areas and committees tackled each. First, the Opioid Epidemic and Youth Committee focused on the use, addiction and overdose epidemics that have been observed locally and nationally. This committee listened to those tackling this issue and sought ways to advocate for the needs of our county's children and youth. Luckily, our committed community is doing much in this arena and Commissioners were gratified by what they learned.

Second, our Advocacy Committee sought to review the Commission's structure, as a body, to ensure we are most effective in our work. The Committee learned from other well-respected Boards, Committees and Commissions and worked to craft a strategic plan to better guide us in the future. With a mission as broad as ours, this will be a critical document moving forward.

The Commission on Children and Youth had a very committed group of youth members this year. In celebration of the Martin Luther King, Jr, Day of Service, they spearheaded an effort to create art therapy kits for distribution to children and youth who are newly arrived to the United States. Ultimately, they collated over 300 packages and have distributed them to organizations supporting youth in Montgomery County.

In addition to our regular work, we continued our traditional signature events: the Youth Having a Voice Roundtable, the Tour de Cookie Cookie Stand and the Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards. In its 10<sup>th</sup> year, the Roundtable was hosted at the National Center for Children and Families and convened 15 youth for a discussion on their exposure to opiates and other drugs, as well as any other topics of concern. This forum is an evening dedicated to hearing directly from county youth. As is our custom, the youth commissioners completely facilitated the conversation themselves while the adult community stakeholders listened. We always appreciate their candor and this year was no exception. More details on the Roundtable will be found later in this report.

This year marked the 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards, which acknowledges members of our community who have gone above and beyond the call of duty to help and guide our young people. Parsing through the nominations was a difficult job, but our hearts were lifted by the good work being done all around us. There are so many unsung heroes in our community and we are grateful to give them the attention they deserve.

The Commission is committed to its mission and appreciates your support in our efforts. Our goal is to ensure that all of our county's children and youth have the opportunities to live their best lives. We look forward to working with you again in the coming year and welcome your thoughts and input into how we can be most successful.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lindsay J. Hoffman".

Lindsay Hoffman  
Chair

## Membership 2016-17

The Commission on Children and Youth has 27 membership positions including one representative from Montgomery County Public Schools; one representative from a private school in the County; one representative from the Montgomery County Department of Recreation; and two representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services.

The remaining 22 members are equally divided among individuals with recent experience with agencies providing services to children and youth; youth and young adults; and parents.

### Youth Representatives

Noor Alsulaihah  
Ethan Chen  
Elias Gonzalez  
Sinclair Redding

Annieka Attah  
Laura Espinoza  
Minh Nguyen

### Parent Representatives

Cecily Adams  
Gina Brown  
Lynne Harris  
Nora Ludden

Shruti Bhatnagar  
Dr. Leslie Copeland-Tune  
Lindsay Hoffman  
Dr. Angela Mickalide

### Private Agency Representatives

Quajalyn Amos  
Shari Argue  
Carson Henry III  
April Kaplan  
  
Elizabeth McGlynn  
  
Roberta Rinker

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.  
Lourie Center, Early Head Start  
YMCA Youth & Family Services  
Montgomery County  
Collaboration Council  
Girls on the Run  
of Montgomery County  
National Center for  
Children and Families

## Membership 2016-17

### Public Agency Representatives

Adriane Clutter	Montgomery County Department of Recreation
Debra Iwanczuk	Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
Rachel Kavanagh	Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
Tamara Niedomanski	Montgomery County Public Schools

### Private School Representative

Dana Bell	Philp School, Laurel
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### Commission Staff

Erin Stillwell	Program Manager, Early Childhood Services, Commission on Children and Youth
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## Recommendations

### RECOMMENDATION #1

Ensure that Montgomery County provides access and resources for County agencies and nonprofit organizations to perform the work outlined in the HOPE and Treatment Act and the Start Talking Maryland Act, both passed by the Maryland General Assembly in 2017. Spread awareness of the definition and risks of opioids to youth throughout the County.

During the 2016-17 year, the Opioid Subcommittee of the Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth undertook the project to study the critical needs of addressing the opioid epidemic in Montgomery County. The Commission reviewed the need, and invited guest speakers to understand the data and work of groups who are already involved in addressing this issue.

Based on this research, **the Commission submits the following recommendations:**

Create better awareness of the term “Opioids” through

- a. Outreach to schools, parents, youth groups, after-school programs, athletic clubs, and community organizations,
- b. Advertising or messaging in or on paper pharmacy prescription bags,
- c. Opinion/editorial pieces in major Maryland news outlets and student publications,
- d. A social media campaign on opioids during National Prevention Week, a campaign by the national Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Create messaging about substance abuse and that young people find accessible and relevant. Youth may disregard messages that seem condescending.

Educate youth and their parents/guardians about community resources available to assist young people who are struggling with a substance abuse issue or might have a family member struggling with an addiction issue. At the *Youth Having a Voice Roundtable* many of the youth participants stated that they had little to no knowledge of substance abuse treatment services in Montgomery County.

We ask that the County Council and Board of Education ensure adequate resources are available to support the work of organizations like Many Voices for Smart Choices, Speak Up, Save a Life and Operation Prevention which educate youth about drug addiction and spread awareness about Good Samaritan laws.

## Recommendations

### **RECOMMENDATION #2**

Ensure that Montgomery County implements programs and invests in resources that support the following priority areas: health and wellness for youth; fostering a supportive school climate; and youth transitioning through adverse childhood experiences.

During the 2016-17 year, the Advocacy Subcommittee of the Commission on Children and Youth reviewed previous priorities of the Commission and found that specific categories of concern consistently emerged as top priorities. There continues to be a need for an emphasis on the following areas:

- Health + Wellness, particularly ensuring access to information on health
- School Climate, including cross-district conversations with diverse participants and establishing school as a safe space for students
- Youth Transitioning, including fostering community dialogues that inform all stakeholders on issues pertaining to youth

While a number of programs and initiatives have begun over the years to address health and wellness, school climate and youth transitioning, we urge the County to continue developing programs to meet the needs of the youth and, equally as important, invest the proper resources into these programs so that our children and youth will thrive.



# Commission Activities

## Guest Speaker Highlights

- Ms. Alejandra Munoz, STEER Program
- Ms. Meghan Westwood, Maryland Treatment Centers
- Mr. Vernon Spriggs, Many Voices for Smart Choices
- Ms. Odile Brunetto, Commission on Aging
- Ms. Isabella Schoenfeld, Commission on Aging

## Testimony Highlights

- Letter to the Board of Education

## Guest Speakers

- On October 12, 2016, the Commission welcomed Ms. Alejandra Munoz from the STEER Program and Ms. Meghan Westwood from Maryland Treatment Centers. Both Ms. Munoz and Ms. Westwood provided commissioners valuable information on the extent, patterns and trends of opioid use in Montgomery County.
- On January 11, 2017, the Commission welcomed Mr. Vernon Spriggs, Prevention Coordinator from the Many Voices for Smart Choices Program. Mr. Spriggs shared information about an outreach effort being utilized in schools to raise awareness about opioid abuse and overdoses entitled "Speak Up, Save a Life."
- On February 8, 2017, Ms. Odile Brunetto, Director, Area on Aging and Commission on Aging and Ms. Isabella Schoenfeld, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice Chair, Commission on Aging joined the Commission on Children and Youth to discuss the organizational structure and highlights of their work.

## Testimony and Presentations

- In June 2016 and January 2017, the chair and vice chair of the Commission met with Ms. Ahluwalia, Director of Health and Human Services to provide updates on priorities and commission activities.
- On October 19, 2017, the Commission participated in the HHS Committee roundtable discussion and identified the top two policy priorities for the 2016-17 year.
- On January 26, 2017, the Commission transmitted a letter to the Montgomery County Board of Education commenting on the Superintendent's Recommended Fiscal Year 2018 Operating Budget and expressing gratitude for the Superintendent and Board of Education's statements of inclusion.

# Commission Activities

## Youth Having a Voice Roundtable

The Commission hosted its 10<sup>th</sup> annual Youth Having a Voice Roundtable on December 5, 2016 at the National Center for Children and Families in Bethesda. A diverse group of young people from local high schools joined the Commission for a profound discussion on the topic of suicide among youth and opioid/prescription drug abuse.

The youth commissioners developed the questions and facilitated the roundtable discussion. The youth participants were encouraged to be honest and their responses were both informative and reflective. Their candid answers provided adults in the room insights into youth experiences in Montgomery County.

During the discussion on suicide, many youth bravely shared personal stories about their own mental health struggles. They also shared the experiences of friends and family who had attempted suicide or ended their life by suicide. Participants shared concern about the lack of resources or the lack of knowledge of resources available to students to assist with suicide prevention. The Commission invited a mental health professional from EveryMind to share resources on crisis prevention and interventions services available in Montgomery County.

The other topic of discussion was opioid and prescription drug abuse. The youth facilitators asked the Roundtable participants to share their knowledge and potential experiences with opioids. Surprisingly, most students were generally unfamiliar with the word “opioid.” They were more familiar with common street names for drugs, but did not seem familiar with opioids in particular or how dangerous and addictive they are. Most participants also stated that they did not have much experience with drug use, although some described knowing classmates or others who they know have used or been caught using drugs.

## Tour de Cookie

On May 5, 2017, the Commission had the privilege to participate in the Tour de Cookie bike ride supporting the Tree House Child Advocacy Center. The youth commissioner took pride in creating a “Happy Camper” themed cookie stand and served dozens of delicious cookies generously donated by the Bean Bag Deli.



### Activity Highlights

- MLK Day of Service
- Youth Having a Voice Roundtable
- Tour de Cookie

## Activity Highlights

- 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Services to Youth Awards Ceremony

# Commission Activities

## Outstanding Service to Youth Awards

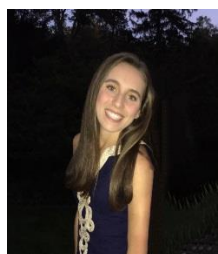
On May 18, 2017, the Commission hosted its 31<sup>st</sup> annual Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards at the Gilchrist Auditorium on the Rockville Campus of Johns Hopkins University. The Commission was privileged to present six awards to individuals and organizations whose dedication, vision and service to children and youth made a difference in the lives of others. The Commission was extremely honored to have two very talented young performers from Springbrook High School, Lila Cooper and Aaron Briones provide an unforgettable musical performance at the event.

The award is named in honor of Dr. Nancy Dworkin, past chairperson for the Commission on Children and Youth who passed away in 1987. Dr. Dworkin was the Director of the Center for Unique Learners, a Rockville based school for children with learning disabilities. Her upbeat instructional philosophy focused on “teaching to strength” and encouraging all students to develop skills that would maximize their potential. Dr. Dworkin’s philosophy is echoed in the Commission’s purpose for establishing this Awards Program—encouraging each person to reach their own potential for providing service to others.

Awardees included:

- Ms. Carli Needle, Youth Award Recipient
- Mr. Morris H. Hudson, BROTHERS, Service Provider Award Recipient
- Pride Youth Services, Butterfly Award Recipient
- Lumina Studio Theatre, Organization Award Recipient
- Mr. Donald Williams, Unity Christian Fellowship, Volunteer Award Recipient

## 2017 Outstanding Service to Youth Awardees



*Carli Needle*  
*Youth Award*



*Morris H. Hudson*  
*Service Provider Award*



*Pride Youth Services*  
*Butterfly Award*



*Lumina Studio*  
*Organization Award*



*Donald Williams*  
*Volunteer Award*

## Priorities 2017-18

Our top priority is to support policy and budget decisions that promote the safety and well-being of children and youth, and furthermore, work to ensure children and youth have access to successful futures.

The Commission is working to affirm the needs, aspirations and achievements of all the County's young people through these two priorities:

### Priority 1:

The Commission is concerned about the mental health of children of all ages in Montgomery County. We intend to examine services available for mental health treatment and discover gaps in services

### Priority 2:

The Commission wants to be proactive in identifying and addressing the needs of undocumented children and youth in Montgomery County, particularly those impacted by DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals). We will recommend options for community supports for children and youth and work to establish schools as safe spaces.

**Isiah Leggett, County Executive**

**Uma S. Ahluwalia, Director of Health and Human Services**

**JoAnn Barnes, Chief, Children Youth and Family Services**



**Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services**

**Children, Youth and Families Services**

**Commission on Children and Youth**

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*Language translation and alternative formats of this report are available upon request.  
For additional information on the Commission, please call or write at the address and telephone numbers listed above.*

*Montgomery County does not discriminate on the basis of disability in employment or in the admission/access to its programs and services.*